wat 4/23/69

MEMORANDUM
To: Harold Weisberg
From: Gary Schoener
Date: 4/23/69

Subject: Sirhan psychiatric testimony, with special reference to Newsweek

Note: My background is this: 1966 BA in Psychology, cum laude, With Distinction in all subjects, Cornell University
PhD candidate, Clinical Psychology, U. of Minn.
Research Assistant, Dept. of Psychiatry Research, U. of M.

I am interested in hypnosis and have read much of the experimental literature on the subject. Currently I am engaged in hypnosis research.

1. The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale cannot be used to detect "psychotic tendencies" i.e. there is not one iota of proof that this is possible--naturally, psychotic behavior can manifest itself during the testing just as during an interview, but the test adds nothing in and of itself--"regressed to infantile behavior" and "fragmented under stress" are terms which are not even accepted as meaningful by many psychologists, nor are their any criteria for their application
2. The MMPI, in which I am well trained, which was developed here, and which my boss (Paul Meehl) helped put together, is badly misused. Idividual item responses have no meaning whatsoever, despite what was said at the trial. The test was empirically derived, so that persons obtaining certain scale scores or patterns of scale scores can be predicted to have certain characteristics. On retesting, although the scales are often quite stable, individual items are answered in an opposite fashion to the first testing. Avoiding responding to the statements mentioned in Newsweek, or the responses to any items, are totally meaningless. The failure to respond to an item has even less meaning than the response to it, and is worth less than nothing.
3. Rorschach interpretation is an art, and there is no indication that it has any meaning whatsoever. In other words, although there is considerable evidence that the MMPI can lead to some very correct statements about personality, there is no such evidence for the Rorschach. There are easy alternatives to every interpretation mentioned in Newsweek. In fact, the examples chosen by Newsweek were absolutely ludicrous, and would be disagreed with by a number of top Rorschachers, which is a dubious distinction anyway. Finally, there is no reason that the Rorschach can't be faked, even without coaching. All you have to do is say queer things. The MMPI has validity scales which can check for this. If the MMPI profile provided no good evidence of maladjustment, so that they had to focus on item responses, then I would be interested in exploring Sirhan's validity scale pattern. All of this is true also with the TAT. Finally, projectives are heavily affected by cultural background as are all psychological tests.
4. Using the Bender to diagnose psychosis is utter nonsense. It is a test for deficits related to brain damage. Again, the Newsweek article leaves one with the impression that the only good test, the MMPI, produced no solid evidence of psychosis. If this is true then Sirhan could be faking and the psychologists, in any event, are nuts.
5. The study of Sirhan under hypnosis is absolute bullshit. From the research literature:
   1. There is no way to insure that a person is under hypnosis unless they are in deep trance and you can try sticking them with pins--otherwise, faking is easy.
   2. There is no evidence that hypnosis produces an accurate or truthful recounting of an event. Quite the contrary. It is easy to produce a distortion, due to either the subject or the demand characteristics (often hard to spot) in the hypotic situation. 3. saying that Sirhan had self-hypnotized himself is totally meaningless horseshit--there could be no evidence sufficient for it. Sirhan could have been in a dissociated state, but there is no way of knowing now. Hypnosis could add nothing but possibly fakery here, or distortion due to subtle cues provided by the hypnotist without his awareness.

Memorandum: Re Psychological Tests used in Sirhan case
To: Harold Weisberg
From: Gary Schoener
Date: 5/11/69

Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS): This is the finest Intelligence measure for use with adults and is the most commonly used. There is no systematic or formal way to infer anything about personality from it. While a psychotic thinking disorder might namifest itself in answers to questions on the test, the test adds little or nothing to picking up such data, since one would easily spot it in the interview if such were the case. The test is individually administered. According to the Newsweek reporting in the Sirhan case, it was used to infer psychosis. This might sound more weighty to a jury, since it is a test, not just a professional opinion.

Bender Gestalt Test (Bender): This test is used to help detect certain types of intellectual (specifically, perceptual-motor) problems which are often signs of organic brain damage. The subject copies different geometric shapes. Brain damaged individuals make certain types of mistakes if their damage is in the area of the brain which deals with perceptual-motor functioning. At the Sirhan trial, psychosis was inferred, something for which there is no evidence that the test can be used in said manner. In fact, the brief description in Newsweek suggested the possiblility of normal responding. Ironically, there is an important study in the literature in which the people who published top research on the Bender in the past 10 years were asked to separate protocols produced by brain damaged kids vs. those produced by emotionally disturbed kids. Their hit rate, or rate of correct separation, was only 50%--chance level! With kids it is more difficult to use. But, there is zero evidence that it can be used to detect psychosis.

Rorschach Ink Blots: This test consists of 10 inblots to which the patient is asked to give his impressions or feelings. The theory is that he will project his unconscious feelings into his perceptions of the blots, since they are ambiguous stimuli. There is no systematic way to use it, and the only scoring systems have not demonstrated their validity. Experts often agree on the meaningfulness or importance of a particular response, and even when they do agree, there is no way of telling whether they are correct. The arguments recounted from the trial in Newsweek for psychosis as inferred from this test are very weak ones and could not be defended. Although the test is widely used, ideas drawn from it are typically treated as speculative.

(MMPI)

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory: I can get you statements from experts on this--i.e. my boss, Paul Meehl, who helped develppe it, invented the most important scoring technique and most important validity scale, or Starke Hathaway, one of the two originators of the test (the other is dead). I am well trained in its use, since this is the place where it was develpped and the world wide center for its use. It consists of 10 basic clinical scales, and three validity scales. It is the only personality test which is pretty good, if not excellent, at picking up people faking both good and bad, and even has a correction factor for those who tend to underrate or overrate their pathology, so that even with faking, the finall clinical scale scores are similar to those obtained while not faking (much experimental data to back this up). It was empirically derived: patients with different symptoms, for example, with the depression scale, depressed vs. non-depressed patients, were given items to answer. Th items which separated the two groups were used for a scale, which, after extensive item analysis proceedures, was then cross-validated on another group. Then, after all of the scales were devised, Meehl suggested that the test be given to people and similarities in the configuration of scale scores be looked for. When they were found, massive studies were done which found that certain scale configurations (called, profiles), had certain characteristics, and that a probability could be validly attached to the possibility that a person with a certain profile would exhibit a certain symptom as compared with the normal population or other mentally ill persons. So, an individual scale, or individdal item, may mean nothing. Individual scales, but more important, profiles of scale patterns, are what counts. No one knows why a person does or does not answer a particular item, but only what to expect given a certain scale score or pattern of the scales. On retesting, the scale score is often unchanged, although different items are answered.

add on mission
of Hunter - Harmony
Howard Dempsey,
etc. ? Gary
3/23/69 suggests,
Gary is to send
data on FBI in
South. It should
be added in app.
also on Malcolm
he is to send parallels,
etc. That also should
be added.
Solomon Jones - shots
from bushes - white
sheet found in
Mustang.

Marty 4/23/69

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You must have the stuff on RFK. Tonight I will try to call Lillian. I will ask her to send the stuff to you. It is simple: Sirhan said he knew a guy in the kitchen. The guy is on the SS PRS list, and his car keys were in Sirhan's pocket. Sirhan's keys to his own car were in the car which was several blocks away. The kitchen employee's car was in the alley! She got the license plate from a photo of the car and had it checked out. Also on RFK, Sirhan probably could not have fired the fatal shot, which came from point blank range--and again, no ballistics on that bullet. Then the girl in the polka dot dress.

On King: Shots from the bushes--1. Solomon Jones, King's Chaufeur said they came from there and a guy with a white hood rushed out--remember that a white sheet was found in the mustang. 2. Cornflake Carter said shots came from there 3. Cops and firemen across street also thought so. Again, no ballistics.

Assailant: 1. Sketch doesn't resemble Ray 2. The only eyewitness to identify Ray was drunk according to his wife (ie like Brennan's bad eyesight) She said that the guy was about 125lbs and smaller than Ray. Clothes found in mustang were for small man (Ray is about 5'11"), maybe around 125lbs. [also note cigarette buts all over car, and Ray doesn't smoke] 3. Rifle carefully laid against building--carefully wrapped in blanket inside of box so as not tosmudge prints

Car: Witnesses reported two mustangs. 1. Witnesses on first floor of building across street said man from rooming house went south to the other mustang 2. 2nd mustang had whiplash antenna--used for radio transmissions--remember the false radio reports!

I suggest beefing up the King stuff. I will find citations for this stuff and enlarge upon it so you can use--see Hane's article in Look--he covers most or all of it, and his article was the best summary of the stuff I had gotten from newspapers--in fact, it is better than my notes in some respects.

Do not count me out yet on getting money for Coup. I have some more ideas. How long can I borrow this? I will start approaching some rich people. Have you fried any Jew's--this is as natural for them as it is for the blacks, and the blacks are not good for money now.

Take it easy and let me know what I can do.

Gary

PS: There are 3 copies of my memo on the JD and the Washington proceedings--send them to Wecht and Forman or whoever you deem it advisable to send to. Omit Dan's name if you see fit. I will send it to no one. It is yours to use as you please.

PSS: My memo on Sirhan--I can't emphasize enough how badly the MMPI, the only objective and empirically based personality test was misused. Individual item responses mean absolutely nothing, and never were expected to mean anything. We don't know how or why the test works, but only that it does. I can enlarge on this if you like. Bear in mind that I probably know more about the test, being trained here, under Meehl, and Hathaway who devised the test, than any of those nuts on the West Coast. My professional qualifications are more where I have studied, and under who, than by degree. But, I do know the literature cold, and that is what counts. If there is no research which supports their testimony, then it has no validity. What interests me here is what Sirhan's MMPI looks like. It sounds as though it is not psychotic, otherwise they would never have gone off the deep end with individual items. If it is normal, then he could be faking craziness, for the MMPI is the only one which corrects for faking in either direction. In other words, either patients or students or professors, when told to fake in either direction (crazy or normal), come out with the same rough scores, due to a readjustment which is automatic. (Meehl develpped this scale, the K scale, a % of which is added to each clinical scale.) Unless Newsweek is way off, it sounds like there is something very fishy here. My colleagues agree with me on this. We smell a rat.